

After Everything

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After everything they had gone throughâ€¦the Triceraton's had wonâ€¦they had stolen back the pieces of the heart of darkness. Everything they had suffered, all they had fought for was gone in a matter of moments.

Leo struggled to control his irritation at this setback. Their six months had quickly dwindled down to a matter of weeksâ€¦and with the two fragments gone it was imperative they retrieve that final piece and reclaim the other two. Otherwise they would be forsaking Splinter and the Earth forever.

Glancing around the bridge he noticed he was left alone to pilot the ship the only other being on the bridge with him was the Fugitoid.

"I'll be doing *Bzzz* diagnostic repairs for the *beep* next twelve hours at least." The cyborg stated. "You can feel free to get some rest in the meantime."

"Alright..." Leo stated as he got up and moved to the recreation deck where everyone was sitting and eating around the broken TV. He noticed that everyone was sharing steamer baskets of soup dumplings, pork buns, and other dishes that filled his nostrils with the pungent and spicy scents of garlic, onions, and ginger. The leader-in-blue could feel his mouth water in delight.

"What up, Leo?" Mikey called before he popped a shrimp pot sticker

into his mouth. "Care to join us for some dim sum?"

"Sure," Leo said as he helped himself to a piece of green onion pancake and happily relishing the flavor of the sesame oil and green onions. However, something was making him feel uneasy as he glanced around the room at his family friends. Raph and Mikey were fighting over a piece of Shumai. Casey was trying to entertain April by stuffing an entire chicken bao into his mouth. April on the other hand just rolled her eyes as she brought a piece of noodle wrapped shrimp to her mouth. Leo made another cursory glance around the room to be certain; sometimes Donnie had a tendency to almost fade away into the background.

"Hey," Leo asked trying not to bring up any unneeded alarm. "Is Donnie still fixing the damage in the engine room?"

"Noâ€|" April. "He finished repairs an hour agoâ€|I suggested he join us here. But he said he needed to be alone for a little while."

"Maybe he's in the holodeck?" Mikey suggested. "I saw him headed that direction?"

"Yeahâ€|" Raph said. "He still looked kinda down about everything that happened today." Mikey took advantage of Raph's momentary distraction, plucking the small barrel shaped dumpling up from the steamer basket and popping it in his mouth.

"MIKEY!" Raph snarled angrily.

"Hey, you snooze, you lose, bro," Mikey smiled cheekily at his red-banded brother. "Besides, we can always get more from the food replicator."

"Maybe Donnie's talking with the hologram of Splinter?" April offered to return to the topic at hand.

"Or putting in some extra training," Casey suggested earning him a slap on the shoulder by April.

"Maybeâ€|" Leo said the thought had crossed his mind when Mikey had suggested Donnie was in the holodeck. "I'm going to go look for him."

"Right," April said as she got up and had the replicator make another steamer basket of shrimp and pork Shumai before things between Raph and Mikey got too violent.

Getting up Leo walked up the stairs to the door leading to the holodeck, the computer consul outside the deck did display a hologram was in session. Putting his ear slit to the door he tried to hear if Donnie was talking, he didn't want to interrupt if his brother was seeking Splinter's guidance. But he heard nothing...pressing the door release button he opened the door. Instead of the dojo, the lab, or even Donnie's room back at the lair as he expected, he instead saw a lush, day lit forest. Several feet in the distance he could see the farm house. If felt so real down to the sound of the chickens clucking.

The sound of flowing water some ways into the forest told him they

were near the stream. Donnie had spent time there whenever he was upset or confused when they had lived in the farmhouse. So maybe justâ€¦maybeâ€¦and sure enough, sitting on a large rock was none other than his missing brother. The purple-masked turtle was sitting with his knees drawn up to his chest. His head rested on his knees looking down the path of the stream, seemingly unaware he had company.

Leo, however, knew this was a lieâ€¦his brother did have moments where he was completely aware of his surroundings. It was times like this that his senses were the most acute. Cautiously Leo approached his purple-masked brother until he was standing next to him. Slowly sitting down he said nothing as he waited for Donnie to acknowledge he wasn't alone. Fortunately, he didn't have to wait long as Donnie lifted his head, and ran the heel of one hand across his eyes as though he was trying not to show his eldest brother that he was starting to give into weakness.

Leo blinked somewhat in concern but said nothing in regards. The purple-masked turtle glanced over at him before his shoulders rounded defensively as he hugged his knees closer to his chest. Donnie's eyes were red-rimmed and appeared overwhelmed with all that had previously happened.

Leo honestly couldn't blame him. He could remember Donnie, Mikey, and Casey rushing off to stop the Triceraton's from taking the fragments before an explosion went off.

"We were too late!" Donnie announced from the stairs case with a hidden note of anguish in his voice. "They've got the pieces, Leo!"

And then when they finally escaped the Triceraton's, Donnie let the frustration of everything get to him as he dropped to his knees.

"All thatâ€¦for nothing!" Donnie sobbed as started to lose any emotional control he held. "I've failed!" Leo could remember exchanging concerned glances with Raph in that moment. The last time they had seen Donnie truly have a break down was when they had been kids. However, the look on Raph's face clearly indicated that he had seen this happen in a much more recent time. Instinctively April and Mikey were at Donnie's side reassuring him that despite the fact they lost the fragments of the Black Hole Generator, they were all still alive because of him and that was what truly mattered.

Leo did agree with their sentimentsâ€¦but at the same time nothing would matter until those fragments were destroyed for good and all. And if it came down to it, he would sooner wipe out the entire empire of those evil, alien ceratopsid'sâ€¦every man, woman, and child, than stand aside and let them willfully destroy the Earth with the Heart of Darkness. But that is a decision they needed to come to later, so long as that last fragment was out of the Triceraton's clutches they still had some hope of retrieving the other two pieces.

"The others are having Chinese in the rec room right now." Leo pointed out in a light attempt to gadge Donnie's anxiety level. "It all looked really good, you feel like getting some?"

"I'm not really hungry." Donnie answered morosely. This struck a cord

in Leo's mind...when his more intellectual brother was upset he would become reclusive. Lack of hunger or a denying himself food was more a product of anxiety.

"Soâ€|" Leo awkwardly asked in an attempt to get his younger brother to open up. "So the farmhouse, huh? I thought you said you didn't miss the place?"

"I don't!" Donnie barked with a sharp insistent tone in his voice, his eyes still not meeting Leo's. "And there are certain events I would rather forget."

"Butâ€|" Leo supplied sensing there was more.

"Butâ€|" Donnie answered. "I will admit that the time we were there also had its good moments as well."

"Such asâ€|?" Leo inquired.

"Nothing comes to mind." Donnie sighed.

"Reallyâ€|?" Leo asked as he continued to dig at his brother, which caused the brown eyed Turtle's eyes to narrow in irritation. "You tell me that there were good moments here, and when I ask you what moments were good, you can't think of anythingâ€|"

"What do expect me to say?!" Donnie shot back. "Almost every good event was followed with something to ruin itâ€|and I'm usually the one behind it! Heck, the reason we even were at the farmhouse was because of that stupid argument I had with you! Ever since the second invasion all I have done is fail this family. I've failed to help Karai not once, but twice. The medication I made to help you resulted in the creation of the Creep and now we've lost the pieces of the black hole generatorâ€|all because I couldn't do anything to stop it."

"Donatelloâ€|" Leo whispered taken aback by this outburst, he wouldn't have been more shocked if the purple-masked turtle had slugged him in the face. This pent up outburst of self-loathing was almost out of character for the gentle-hearted genius. Yes, Donnie could be a screamerâ€|particularly when he was frustrated. But out-and-out temper tantrums were once in a blue moon rare.

Ever since they had been little, both Donnie and himself had a kind of bond, they could understand each other on a fundamental level. This didn't mean they related to each other on a regular basis. If anyone were to ask the leader-in-blue which of his brothers he related to, in general, he would have said Raph every time.

But if that question had been which brother he trusted the most of his siblings. With the exception of some situations...he would say trust Donnie the most out of his brothers. And even the few situations where Donnie wasn't trustworthy still has good intentions behind them. One such instance was the time Donnie had rushed off to save April from mortal danger leaving his brothers behind.

As leader, Leo did need to report this to Splinter. He understood Donnie's reasons for leaving the team. But at the same time he did need to impress upon his brother that despite having sound reasons, abandoning the team for any reason still could not be

tolerated.

When summoned to the dojo Donnie explained his side of the story, but maturely made no justifications for his actions nor any allusions to being in the right. The wise rat had weighed words before telling Donnie that while he understood April would not have contacted him if she had not been in a situation beyond her control. The decision to leave his brothers was not a choice that came without a consequence, as such he would be grounded in the lair for the next two weeks. A punishment Donnie had accepted gracefully.

Having three younger brothers, Leo understood he could never be the brother his siblings wanted him to be. But he did strive to be the brother he felt his siblings needed him to be. He excelled at ninjitsu to be a shining example of what their father wanted them to become—or how he interpreted it. Unfortunately, his brothers didn't always see the example for what it was.

Raph was impulsive. A lot of his anger was fueled by jealousy as he was the second eldest, and as such kept seeing himself as second best. While Leo could point out there were areas where Raph was the superior fighter, Raph still competitively saw things as Leo did it better first.

Mikey could be a strong fighter when it came down to it, but at the best of times, he was random and unfocused. Leo could still feel the sting and loss from that one time where Mikey was nearly lost to them forever.

But then there was Donnie—his intellectual brother was an enigma wrapped in a riddle that held no answer. Donnie was the least violent of the four of them—and hated every moment of it. While he wasn't a particularly strong fighter—at least not in comparison to his brothers—he was quite capable of holding his own in a battle. The weakness was not so much of question of whether he paid attention to his lessons, but rather what was holding him back.

Much like Mikey, Donnie did have something that was holding him back from reaching his full potential. For Mikey, it was his lack of focus. If he only would focus on his training and not on whatever inane concept that came to his head at a given time, he could be the best fighter of all of them.

Donnie's case, however, felt like there was a part of himself, that he was deliberately trying to deny. It was as though he felt like revealing that side of himself would make the others think less of him...or worse think he shouldn't be on the team at all.

And yet there also had also been times where they had treated Donnie like he had no standing on the team. He himself had his particularly guilty moments at this, while he did rely on Donnie's techno skills at times. He didn't always see what he had to offer for what it was. He strongly believed in the traditional skills and weapons Splinter taught them. For him that was the correct way and there was no other way besides that.

Donnie's skills and interests in technology were, helpful yes, but in many ways, Leo also saw them as a distraction. His genius brother did so much for their family, and what was more is he did it alone. There was never any offers of assistance, or interest in anything Donnie

did beyond results. And worse yet was that if he wasn't working on something fast enough, they would pressure him to work faster or immediately have a solution for something. When he was putting his very health and wellbeing at stake with his efforts for the family. He'd gone days where he had hardly eaten in his attempts to find and create retro-mutagen. He'd stay up whole nights to perfect a weapon he intended to help stop the kraang invasion. Even all that effort he put into with trying to cure Karai. Donnie had warned them the Retromutagen possibly would not work on her, and it didn't.

Then there was the time where both Mikey and himself had gone to get a mind worm so that Donnie could somehow modify it so that it could cancel out the one controlling Karai. That had not only resulted in Donnie not only losing his mind. But he had stayed up for nights with very little rest trying to create a solution...only for it to end in failure.

Leo bit his lip at that memory. He had known Donnie had pushed himself so hard to see that Splinter's daughter was free from the hold the Shredder had on her, only to result in nothing. Splinter had sadly, but graciously accepted that Karai may be lost to them forever. But Leo refused to allow all that effort just to go to waste. While he had meant to be encouraging, he felt worse by what he said next.

"Donnie, you know how much this would mean to Sensei." Leo had said with a bite of frustration in his voice.

"Leo... I'm trying as hard as I can." Donnie had answered. He was clearly tired and irritated that everything he had attempted had been for naught. If the blue-masked ninja had only kept his mouth shut or said something more encouraging perhaps things would have gone differently that horrible night. But instead, he let his frustration get to him as he shoutedâ€¦|

"Then try harder!" Leo automatically regretted this statement as Donnie's back stiffened before he suddenly snapped.

"TRY HARDER!" Donnie screamed as he tossed the clipboard of notes and observations he had taken on the mind worm to the floor. "I *always* have to find the solution! You're "leader" Leo, you find the answer! Or what about Raph?!"

This had caused an intense argument to breakout between the four of them. During which Donnie became distracted when his phone started to go off and he turned to answer it as if the argument didn't matter. Leo wanted to rip the phone from his brother's hand and tell April that Donnie was too busy trying to find a way to cure Karai, so he would be unable to talk to or see her until further notice. Splinter, however, ended the argument before he could do so. When demanded to know what was going on, Donnie glowered at Leo with disgust before stating: "Nothing, sensei!"

Leo had felt his jaw drop in shock at how his younger brother could just outright say this was nothing. "I'm heading out!" Donnie announced as he stormed towards the lair door. "April needs me!" The blue-masked turtle was incensed by what he was hearing. How could he say a girl who would never see him as more than just a friend needed him when Karai was under the control of their greatest enemy when she should be with her family? Her real family?

"You are needed here now, Donnie!" Leo had shouted before angrily running after the spoiled, stuck up brat. "Donnie!" Donnie continually ignored him as he climbed into the stealth bike, closed the stealth shields over himself and drove off. "DONNIE!" Leo shouted once more, but it was no use. If this wasn't Donnie's version of a "Fuck You," he didn't know what was.

"My sons!" Splinter said firmly. "You cannot drive each apart. In times like these, unity is important. Do not forget the most basic lesson, an effective team thinks as one!" Leo seethed in frustration quietly for a moment before he stalked back into the lair.

"Yo, Leo." Mikey said, an uncharacteristic edge to his voice before he walked away. "Not cool, brah."

"Some Leaderâ€¦" Raph growled as he also walked away. "You seem to care more about Karai, the you do the rest of us." Leo had nothing to say to that as his shoulders slumped in defeat.

Even today when he had been demanding a solution from his younger brother to help them get away from the Triceratons.

"I DON'T KNOW!" Donnie had screamed in frustration. "This ship is awesomely complex...I'm not as smart as the Professor, okay! I just build stuff out of junk and Kraang parts."

That was the other thing about Donnie...he was the only person with his intelligence level. He was smarter than his three brothers put together. The only beings he could related to or go toe to toe with intellectually we're back on earth. This whole journey had offered a scope even Splinter for all his wisdom couldn't fathom. It was no wonder someone like Donnie would feel inferior in comparison. And yet when it mattered...it was Raph who stepped up and offered the encouragement Donnie needed. Raph who had the least patience when it came to Donnie's scientific prowess. Raph who would often make cracks about how Donnie was useless as a ninja.

A sad ghost of a crossed Leo's face as he brought his fist to his head. "Some brother I've been." Leo sighed before he reached out placed a hand on Donnie's shoulder.

"For the record, D...you haven't failed us yet." Leo said. "And I know you never will, you will always be there when we need you. If there is ever a time you will fail us, it will be when you truly give up on this family and yourself. But I know that time won't happen because you are stronger than even you realize. I've seen you build and create amazing things on Earth, and we would never have survived out here as long as we have if you weren't with us."

"But I wasn't able to prevent the pieces from being stolen," Donnie pointed out. "Now we have a month and a half to get that third fragment and recapture the other twoâ€¦"

"That is a setback," Leo commented. "But we will get that last piece and destroy it. That should slow down the Triceratons long enough for us to take back the remaining pieces. Then we can go home to Splinter and everything will be as it was." Donatello, unfortunately, did not share his brother's optimism as a rather discouraged look crossed his face.

"About thatâ€¦" Donnie said as he got up and paced a few times. "I keep getting this feeling that Splinter would be gone for good this time." Leo could feel himself start to become angry at this, but reigned in his emotions. Donnie was not one to express such apprehension lightly.

"Don't get me wrong, when I say this because I want Master Splinter back as much as you do." Donnie continued. "We all do. But saving both the Earth and Splinter is the best case scenario, and not all events end with that. More often than not, such situations end with great sacrifice and even once the goal is achieved there is still the sense that those who were lost in the battle should be there standing with them, sharing the glory that they had fought so hard for. But Raph, Mikey, April, and I...we've seen Splinter die before at the hands of the Shredder, and we were unable to do anything to stop it. As much as we wanted to believe he was alive, we had to admit to the possibility of the worst. It was purely miraculous when we discovered that he had survived his supposed death so that we could reunite with him. Only to see him get murdered before our eyes once more by the Shredder's selfish whims. I don't...I don't think I could take seeing that happen a third time."

Leo opened his mouth to retort but surprisingly found that he had nothing to say. Even the last time he had sought the advice of that hologram of Splinter. It had ended the conversation by saying "No matter what happens, know that I'm proud of you all."

"In a way...Splinter has been preparing us for the time he would eventually leave us." Donnie said as she stopped pacing and wrapped his arms around himself as though he would break if didn't do so. "Leo, the four of us are 17 years of age now. If we were human teenagers we would be thinking about our lives and our futures, completing high-school, deciding on what sort of college we wanted to enter, finding careers. Without Splinter all we have is each other." Leo stood up and regarded his brother's back before he approached him and slung his arm around Donnie's shoulders. There was a ding sound and the wooded area surrounding them dissolved into the gray metal walls of the holodeck signifying that the time for this session had run out.

"We will save the Earth, Donnie." Leo said firmly. "I believe we will stop Earth from being destroyed. And I believe we can save Splinter as well. I understand that a day will come when Splinter will not longer be in our lives...but that time isn't now or the near future. Come on, let's go join the others. As Splinter once said, 'In times such as these, we should not be apart.'"

Donnie still wasn't as convinced by his brothers words as he wanted to be, but didn't push the issue. Leo wanted to believe in their success and no convincing would get him to see otherwise. In his heart, he prayed that his brothers firm conviction weren't just delusion to spare him from the fears and doubts that still plagued their minds.

End
file.